

THE MIDDLE EAST AND MAGHREB

FACT SHEET

AREA 13,598,218 square kilometers. The Middle East comprises: the Arab-speaking states of the eastern Mediterranean, Israel, the Arabian peninsula, the Nile Valley (Egypt and the Sudan), Libya, and Iran. The Maghreb comprises: Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco.

POPULATION 230 million.

PER CAPITA GNP Varies greatly from a low of \$320 (US) in the Sudan to a high of \$21,340 (US) in the United Arab Emirates.

CLIMATE Long, intensely hot dry summers and relatively mild winters, with occasional cold spells and rain in the northern countries.

LANGUAGES For most of the region Arabic is the official language but almost every country has its own form of colloquial. Persian is spoken in Iran. In Israel, Hebrew and Arabic are the two official languages with the former predominant. English and French are the most widely spoken foreign languages.

RELIGIONS Islam is the religion of the great majority. Eighty percent of Moslems belong to the Sunni persuasion. Most others are Shia whose adherents are the majority in Iran, Yemen and southern Iraq. Judaism is the main religion of Israel. There are Christians in most countries although in none is Christianity the religion of the majority.

GOVERNMENT Almost all countries have authoritarian regimes but the legitimacy of most governments is widely accepted and justice is most often administered in conformity with well-established legal norms based on inherited cultural and religious values. Israel has the only Western style democracy.

AGRICULTURE The chief food crops are wheat, barley and rye in the north, and millet, maize and rice in the south. In addition there is increasing emphasis on cash crops like cotton and tobacco.